

with the usual black kind, there were generally a few dull brown coloured ones, (*Icterus sericeus* of *Licht.*) which I presume are the young. Azara states that the brown-coloured birds are smaller than the black glossy ones, and that they sometimes form one-tenth of the whole number in a flock. In the single specimen which I brought home, the size, with the exception of the length of the wing, is only a very little less. Sonnini, in his notes to Azara, considers the brown birds as the females; I can, however, scarcely believe that so obvious a solution of the difficulty could have escaped so accurate an observer as Azara. These birds in La Plata often may be seen standing on the back of a cow or horse. While perched on a hedge, and pluming themselves in the sun, they sometimes attempt to sing or rather to hiss: the noise is very peculiar; it resembles that of bubbles of air passing rapidly from a small orifice under water, so as to produce an acute sound. Azara states that this bird, like the cuckoo, deposits its eggs in other birds' nests. I was several times told by the country people, that there was some bird which had this habit; and my assistant in collecting, who is a very accurate person, found in the nest of the *Zonotrichia ruficollis* (a bird which occupies in the ornithology of S. America the place of the common sparrow of Europe), one egg larger than the others, and of a different colour and shape. This egg is rather less than that of the missel-thrush, being .93 of an inch in length, and .78 in breadth; it is of a bulky form, thick in the middle. The ground colour is a pale pinkish-white, with irregular spots and blotches of a bright reddish-brown, and others less distinct of a greyish hue. This species is evidently a very close analogue of the *M. pecoris* of North America, from which, however it may at once be distinguished by the absence of the glossy brown on the head, neck, and upper breast,—by the metallic blueness of its plumage in the place of a green tinge, and by its somewhat greater size in all its proportions. The young or brown-coloured specimens of these *Molothri* resemble each other more closely; that of the *M. pecoris* is of a lighter brown, especially under the throat, and the small feathers on its breast and abdomen have each an obscure dark central streak. The eggs of the *Molothri*, although having the same general character, differ considerably; that of the *M. pecoris* being smaller and less swollen in the middle; it is .85 of an inch in length, and .78 in breadth. Its colour cannot be better described than in the words of Dr. Richardson\*—it is “of a greenish white, with rather small crowded and confluent irregular spots of pale liver-brown, intermixed with others of subdued purplish grey.” From this

\* Fauna Borealis, Birds, p. 278. Dr. Richardson states that the egg is only seven lines and a half in length. I presume the measure of eight lines, instead of twelve to the inch, must in this case have been used. I am much indebted to the kindness of Mr. Yarrell for lending me an egg of the *Molothrus pecoris*, forming part of a collection of North American eggs in his possession.

description it is obvious that the egg of *M. niger* is larger and of a much redder tint; the more prominent spots also are larger, the subdued grey being quite similar in both.

If we were to judge from habits alone, the specific difference between these two species of *Molothrus* might well be doubted; they seem closely to resemble each other in general habits,—in manner of feeding,—in associating in the same flock with other birds, and even in such peculiarities as often alighting on the backs of cattle. The *M. pecoris*, like the *M. niger*, utters strange noises, which Wilson\* describes “as a low spluttering note as if proceeding from the belly.” It appears to me very interesting thus to find so close an agreement in structure, and in habits, between allied species coming from opposite parts of a great continent. Mr. Swainson† has remarked that with the exception of the *Molothrus*, the cuckoos are the only birds which can be called truly parasitical; namely, such as “fasten themselves, as it were, on another living animal, whose animal heat brings their young into life, whose food they alone live upon, and whose death would cause theirs during the period of infancy.” It is very remarkable, that the cuckoos and the *molothri*, although opposed to each other in almost every habit, should agree in this strange one of their parasitical propagation: the habit moreover is not universal in the species of either tribe. The *Molothrus*, like our starling, is eminently sociable, and lives on the open plains without art or disguise;‡ the cuckoo, as every one knows, is a singularly shy bird; it frequents the most retired thickets, and feeds on fruit and caterpillars.§

#### AMBLYRAMPHUS RUBER. G. R. Gray.

*Oriolus ruber*, Gmel.

*Amblyramphus bicolor*, Leach.

*Sturnus pyrrhocephalus*, Licht.

*Sturnella rubra*, Vieill.

*Leistes erythrocephala*, Swains. Class. Birds.

This bird frequented marshy places in the neighbourhood of Maldonado, but it was not common there. It is more solitary than the following allied species; I have, however, seen it in a flock. Seated on a twig, with its beak widely open, it often makes a shrill, but plaintive and agreeable cry, which is sometimes single

\* Wilson's American Ornithology, vol. ii. p. 162.

† Magazine of Zoology and Botany, vol. i. p. 217.

‡ See Azara, vol. iii. p. 170.

§ It appears that the eggs in the same nest with that of the *Molothrus pecoris*, are turned out by the parent birds before they are hatched, owing to the egg of the *M. pecoris* being hatched in an unusually short time; in the case of the young cuckoo, as is well known, the young bird itself throws out its foster-brothers. Mr. C. Fox, however, (Silliman's American Journal, vol. xxix. p. 292), relates an instance of three young sparrows having been found alive with a *Molothrus*.